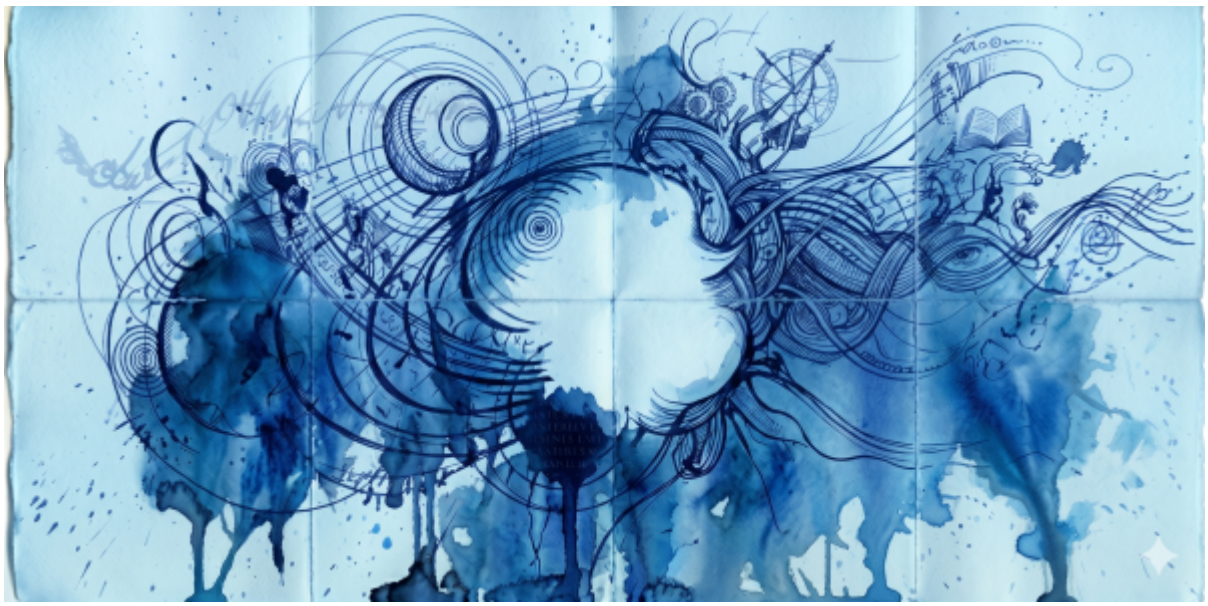
Day 28: The Capacity To Be Alone



In Theory: Within the psychodynamic tradition, D. W. Winnicott made a paradoxical observation that the capacity to be alone is acquired in the presence of another person. The infant who can play contentedly by themselves, does so because they have internalized the presence of a reliable caregiver. The adult who can be alone without restlessness and without the need to fill silence immediately has a sufficient internal world to sustain them. For those who did not receive adequate early holding, aloneness can feel less like solitude and more like abandonment, showing that internal continuity of presence makes absence bearable. This internalized presence acts as a quiet, unseen anchor, transforming what would otherwise be a terrifying psychological void into a space for reverie and self-discovery.

In Experience: Someone who fills every moment with input or activity, not from enthusiasm but from something closer to dread. The silence is too loud. Brief pauses feel unstable, as if something might surface if not immediately covered over. The movement toward stimulation is not chosen so much as compelled, a way of keeping what is inside at a distance.

In Thought: The experience of solitude is not the same for everyone. Whether quiet feels like rest or threat depends on what was internalized long before.

In Print: Storr, A. *Solitude: A Return to the Self* (1988)

In Attention: Notice what arises when sitting alone with no input.